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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 001255

SIPDIS

NEA/ARP, NEA/IPA

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TAGS: PREL KPAL PHUM KU

SUBJECT: KUWAIT LIKELY TO ADOPT "MODERATE" STANCE AT ARAB LEAGUE MINISTERIAL MEETING

REF: A. A) STATE 134964  
    1B. B) KUWAIT 1250

Classified By: Political Counselor Pete O'Donohue for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) Summary: MFA Arab Affairs Bureau replied favorably to ref A demarch, affirming GOK support for a "moderate" approach to the Gaza crisis, continuing prohibition on direct contacts with Hamas, hope for a balanced statement from the December 31 Cairo AL ministerial, and current inclination to oppose an early AL summit. Kuwaiti FM's statements in Oman have nevertheless been unusually harsh, e.g. "It is a black, sad and angry day for the Arabs given the crimes committed by the Israeli arsenal. These crimes are not strange to this regime and the government which has usurped the Palestinian land and rights." Less than 2,000 Kuwaitis took part in a December 28 "rally" outside the National Assembly, during which an Israeli flag was reportedly burned. Details of publicly announced Kuwaiti medical assistance to Gaza remain unclear. End Summary.

¶2. (C) POLCOUNS on December 30 raised with Ahmad Al-Baker, First Secretary in MFA's Arab Affairs Department, ref A points concerning the need to temper rhetoric against Israel, work constructively for a durable cease-fire in Gaza, and pressure Hamas to accept terms similar to those in the 11/26 Arab League statement during the December 31 Arab League Ministerial meeting in Cairo. In response, Al-Baker assured POLCOUNS that the GOK is pursuing just such a moderate approach to resolving the crisis in Gaza and, to this end, is seeking to temper Arab rhetoric and focus attention on the need for an immediate cease-fire, albeit while strongly denouncing the Israeli air raids. Al-Baker noted with appreciation and apparent agreement ref A suggestion that statements from the Arab League ministerial should focus on the principles established through the Arab League's 11/26 statement and UNSCR 1850. Al-Baker noted that the GOK "pins a lot of hope" on the outcome of the December 31 Cairo AL ministerial and anticipates that statements arising from it will be strongly worded, but also fair and balanced.

¶3. (C) Al-Baker noted that FM Shaykh Dr. Mohammad Al-Sabah, who is presently at the GCC Summit in Oman, will return to Kuwait prior to heading off to the December 31 Arab League Ministerial in Cairo. A focus of the AL ministerial, he noted, will be to determine whether a subsequent Arab League summit could usefully contribute to a resolution of the situation in Gaza. While the GOK has not announced a position on this question, Al-Baker indicated that the GOK was leaning away from such a summit, on the grounds that divisions among the various Arab governments might only exacerbate the situation. Al-Baker noted, however, that the ongoing GCC Summit in Oman is expected to come up with a unified position on the possible need for an Arab League summit before COB on December 30; the GOK will almost

certainly join that consensus.

**¶4.** (C) In response to ref A suggestion that Kuwait and other regional states should use their leverage with Hamas to urge an immediate cease-fire, Al-Baker noted that the GOK does not have official communications with Hamas and does not provide it any official support. All official GOK contact with the Palestinians, he said, is conveyed through the government of Mahmoud Abbas, including official GOK assistance.

Communication with Hamas, he noted, is conducted on behalf of Kuwait and the other Arab states through the offices of the Arab League and the Government of Egypt. Hamas is not permitted to engage in fund-raising in Kuwait.

**¶5.** (C) Commenting on actions the GOK may undertake to assist Palestinian civilians in Gaza, Al-Baker said the GOK will "certainly" follow-through on the Foreign Minister's call (ref B) for Kuwaiti hospitals to be made available to civilian Palestinian casualties, although no decision has yet been made on the numbers of casualties that will be accepted, the mode of transportation, or the quantity of funds that will be made available for this endeavor. Kuwait's Council of Minister's directed the Kuwait branch of the Red Crescent Society on December 30 to prepare to provide support for Palestinian victims, but the range of this support is also not yet clear. Al-Baker had no information on the status of two medical "convoys" that were reportedly dispatched by the Kuwait Mercy Assembly, an NGO, to Gaza (ref B).

**¶6.** (C) While the GOK will almost certainly adopt a moderate stance in the Cairo ministerial in hopes of not further fanning the flames currently engulfing Gaza, public and

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private passion remain high in Kuwait. Reiterating in Oman remarks similar to those he delivered here on December 28, the Foreign Minister denounced the violence in Gaza, saying "our hearts before our hospitals are opened to the wounded Palestinians, particularly the innocent civilians. It is a black, sad and angry day for the Arabs given the crimes committed by the Israeli arsenal. These crimes are not strange to this regime and the government which has usurped the Palestinian land and rights. We have to assume great duties. We have to bypass all disputes. We should start first with bridging the gap in the Arab position and bypassing the split in the Palestinian ranks."

**¶7.** (C) As anticipated ref B, a Kuwaiti crowd estimated to number less than two thousand rallied in front of the National Assembly building during the evening of December 28 to denounce the Israeli attacks on Gaza. There was no violence, but an Israeli flag was reportedly burned. Speakers from a variety of points on the Kuwaiti political spectrum issued calls for Arab states to impose an immediate blockade on Israel and to sever ties with "the Zionist entity." Parliament Speaker Jassem Al-Kharafi said "what is happening in Gaza is shameful and painful for all Arabs and Muslims" commenting that the attacks were "indicative of the extent of Israel's mockery of the Arab and Muslim nations." Al-Kharafi said he supported the idea of an immediate Arab League summit to deal with the situation in a "practical" way rather than just issuing statements of condemnation. The Speaker also called on the international community to put pressure on Israel and on the Palestinians to mend the divisions in their internal ranks. The rally did not take on an overtly anti-U.S. tone and there were no known threats of violence against U.S. interests.

**¶8.** (C) Comment: Despite FM Dr. Mohammad's unusually harsh public statements (which track with private sentiment and published editorial opinion (see ref b)), we expect the GOK to support a moderate approach calculated to build a broad Arab consensus and avoid rewarding Hamas. Post remains in close contact with host government security. Despite a strong crescendo of anti-Israel sentiment across Kuwaiti media and public opinion, we do not see operational

implications for Embassy security. End Comment.

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